



The Lewis & Clark Expedition

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On May 14, 1804, the Lewis and Clark Expedition began in St. Charles, Missouri. Over the next 2 ½ years, as it journeyed over 7,000 miles, co-captains Meriwether Lewis and William Clark observed and collected plant, animal, and mineral specimens; studied Native American cultures; mapped geographic features; and recorded daily events in their journals. After wintering on the freezing Midwest plains, and a difficult ascent through the Rocky Mountains, the expedition reached the Pacific Ocean in November 1805. The triumphant return to St. Louis, Missouri, in September 1806, was cause for celebration, because most Americans believed the expedition lost. Although unable to locate a direct water route to the Pacific Ocean, Lewis and Clark succeeded in describing the newly-acquired Louisiana Territory (from which thirteen states were created) and the territory of the Pacific Northwest. Their adventures sparked the American imagination and Missouri quickly became the gateway to the western frontier.



The Corps of Discovery

Nearly sixty soldiers, French engages, and interpreters began the expedition in 1804, but only half of them, including William Clark's slave York and Shoshone interpreter Sacajawea, accompanied Lewis and Clark to the Pacific coast. All were critical to the expedition's success in individual ways. York's hunting skills provided food for the corps; native tribes were impressed with the first black man they ever saw. Sacajawea played a crucial role in acquiring horses to cross the Rocky Mountains. George Drouillard, fluent in Indian sign language, took on scouting duties. John Colter provided tracking skills and later became the first white to see Yellowstone. These and other invaluable contributions made the expedition possible.



MERIWETHER LEWIS (born 1774; died 1809). After active military service, Lewis became President Thomas Jefferson's private secretary in 1801. Jefferson asked Lewis to command a western exploring expedition. With William Clark, Lewis led the journey to the Pacific Ocean and back between 1804 and 1806. In 1807, he was appointed governor of the Louisiana Territory. Amidst financial and political controversies, Lewis committed suicide in 1809.

WILLIAM CLARK (born 1770; died 1838). Clark served in the militia, resigning in 1796 to attend to family properties in Kentucky. In 1803, he accepted the invitation of Meriwether Lewis to co-command an expedition to the Pacific Ocean. Following that successful journey, Clark remained in Missouri, serving as territorial governor (1813-1820) and superintendent of Indian affairs.



From the Office of Secretary of State Robin Carnahan